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Legislative Terms Associated with the Georgia General Assembly

ACT: A bill that has passed both houses in identical form and has been signed by the governor (or has become law without the governor's signature). An act can also be termed a "law" or a "statute." In Georgia, there are two categories of acts:

- **GENERAL ACT:** A law that has uniform application throughout the state, such as education, criminal laws, taxes, and speed limits.
- **LOCAL ACT:** A law that applies to a specific city or county only, such as setting the form of city government, changing the number of county commissioners, and creating or abolishing a city.

ADJOURN: The parliamentary motion to bring legislative business to an end. There are two categories of adjournment in the General Assembly:

- **ADJOURNMENT TO A DAY CERTAIN:** A motion to suspend legislative proceedings on a particular day, while establishing a day and time to resume.
- **ADJOURNMENT SINE DIE:** The final adjournment of a legislative session for the year. The term literally means adjournment without a day [for reconvening].

ADMINISTRATION FLOOR LEADER: A legislator designated by the governor in each house to manage bills initiated or favored by the governor. In addition to the floor leader, the governor may name additional assistant administration floor leaders.

APPROPRIATION: An authorization by the legislature for an agency to spend a specific sum of money for the purposes specified in the appropriation act. In Georgia, the General Assembly enacts three types of appropriation acts:

- **GENERAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT:** A single, omnibus act passed annually to appropriate the funding of all state agencies and programs beginning the July 1 following passage and ending June 30. This act is proposed by the governor based on anticipated state revenues during the fiscal year.
- **AMENDED GENERAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT:** A single act passed annually to amend the general appropriations act then in force. This is done to adjust state spending to actual revenue, take care of emergencies or needs that come up after an appropriation act goes into effect, and to adjust QBE funding local school systems to actual -- rather than projected -- student enrollment. Because the amended general appropriations act often adds additional funding to agencies from that originally appropriated, it is often called a "supplemental appropriation act" [not to be confused with the "supplementary appropriation act"].
- **SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT:** An act that is used to provide additional funding to a particular agency to finish the fiscal year.

AYES AND NAYS: A roll-call vote, also termed "yeas and nays." In the chambers, roll-call votes are taken on the electronic voting machine, with each member's vote recorded in the journal of that house.

BIENNIUM: The two-year period that marks the legal existence of a particular General Assembly. The biennium begins in January when newly elected members of both houses take the oath of office and continues through the two-year terms of members of both houses, ending when members of a new General Assembly are sworn in.

BILL: Proposed legislation considered by the General Assembly. A bill may be general or local [see "act" above]. With the exception of appropriation bills, general bills almost always propose changes to the existing body of statutory law [see "Official Code of Georgia Annotated"].

BUDGETARY RESPONSIBILITY OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE (BROC): A permanent staff arm of the General Assembly that has a variety of powers and responsibilities to advise the legislature with respect to the state budget and the evaluation of state programs and agencies. [Click [here](#) to view BROC web site.]

CALENDAR: A daily listing of the bills and resolutions ready for consideration on the floor prepared by the Clerk of the House and Secretary of the Senate. Each house of Georgia's General Assembly uses two types of calendars:

- **GENERAL CALENDAR:** A daily listing of bills and resolutions that have been reported favorably from committee and are ready for floor consideration. The general calendar is prepared throughout the session and governs the daily agenda in the House and Senate until the rules calendar takes over.
- **RULES CALENDAR:** The daily legislative agenda prepared from bills and resolutions on the general calendar by the rules committee in each house. The rules calendar is in effect in the House and Senate for the last 25 days of a regular session.

CAUCUS: A group of legislators associated together in support of common interests (such as political party, race, or gender) and who meet to discuss policy and strategy and coordinate their legislative efforts.

CHAMBER: The large hall for each house of the General Assembly on the third floor of the state capitol where the entire body meets to act as a body. It is here that "floor action" takes place during consideration of a bill. In the respective chambers of the House and Senate, each member has a designated desk. Additionally, there are galleries for the public to view the house in action.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE: The chief staff officer of the House of Representatives. The Clerk is not a representative but rather a full-time official whose duties include receiving, numbering, and printing copies of all bills and resolutions introduced in the House; recording all committee reports and floor votes on measures; and maintaining the official record of legislative action in the House. [Click [here](#) to view Clerk of the House's web page.]

CODE: A complete compilation of a government's statutes -- no matter when enacted -- and their revisions. [See "Official Code of Georgia Annotated".]

COMMITTEE: A group of legislators appointed by the presiding officer for the study of bills or other legislative purposes. The principal types of committees in the Georgia General Assembly are:

- **CONFERENCE COMMITTEE:** A special committee consisting of three members from each house appointed by the presiding officers to seek a compromise when the two houses have passed different versions of the same bill and insist on their respective positions. In the motion to create a conference committee, each house can vote to instruct or not instruct its members on that committee. If the members are able to reach agreement, a copy of the compromise version of the bill is distributed to members of each house. In each house, a vote is taken to agree or disagree with the conference committee report. If both houses agree, the bill is passed. If they cannot agree, another conference committee can be appointed; otherwise, the bill dies.
- **INTERIM COMMITTEE:** A special committee (often called a study committee) appointed by the presiding officer of one or both houses to study an issue and report back to the General Assembly during the interim between two sessions. Following its report or time for study, the interim committee stands abolished.
- **OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE:** A special committee created by the General Assembly to oversee a project -- typically, a large capital-outlay construction project under jurisdiction of a state authority -- and to advise legislators on funding, statutory, and other changes needing legislative action.
- **STANDING COMMITTEE:** One of a group of permanent legislative committees in each house that study bills that have been introduced and make recommendations to the full house as to whether such bills should be supported. Standing committees are organized around functional areas (e.g., agriculture, education, and health). Generally, no bill can be considered on the floor of a house until reported favorably from standing committee. The list of standing committees is provided for in the rules of each house. Officers and members of standing committees are named by the presiding officer of each house. [Click for list of 1999 standing committees for the [House of Representatives](#) and [Senate](#).]
- **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE:** The entire membership of either house sitting for the purpose of expediting consideration of a bill. When the House or Senate sits as a committee of the whole, the formal rules of procedure for that house are relaxed to permit informal discussion and prompt action.

CONSTITUTIONAL MAJORITY: The majority requirement for passing a bill or resolution that will have the effect of law -- which as prescribed in the Georgia Constitution is a majority of the entire membership of a house (regardless of how many members are actually present). In contrast, many motions on procedural matters require only a "simple majority" -- or a majority of those present and voting.

ENGROSSMENT: A proofreading and verification of a bill or resolution for the purpose of making certain that the copy being officiated is identical with the version of the bill that passed that house. In the House only, a motion to engross can be made at the time of a bill's introduction. If two-thirds of those voting agree, the bill is engrossed, which prohibits any amendments during committee or floor consideration.

ENROLLMENT: Preparation of the final and official copy of a bill or resolution as passed by both houses. With enrollment, the Speaker and Clerk of the House, and President and Secretary of the Senate, certify that relevant constitutional requirements for passing a bill were complied with in their respective houses. Enrollment is the final step before a bill is sent to the governor for signing.

FIRST READERS: A daily list of bills on the day of their introduction containing each new bill's number and title, so called because the day of introduction is the day of the first reading of each bill.

FISCAL YEAR: The 12-month accounting period for appropriations and financial reports. The fiscal year for Georgia state government (and many local governments) begins July 1 of each year, and ends June 30 of the next. Some local governments use the calendar year as their fiscal year, while the federal government's fiscal year begins each Oct. 1. A fiscal year is designated by its ending year (e.g., FY 2000 would begin July 1, 1999 and end June 30, 2000).

FLOOR: Refers to legislative activities taken on the floor of the legislative chambers that involve the entire House or Senate as a sitting body, in contrast to action taken in committee. Thus, "floor amendment" or "floor substitute" involves changes to a bill offered on the floor of a house.

GEORGIA LAWS: The title of the annual series that contains the full text of each law and joint resolution enacted by the General Assembly at that year's legislative session. In addition, for each act or resolution, the series includes the original House or Senate number, act number, and date signed by the governor. Vol. I of the series contains general acts and resolutions, while Vol. II has local acts and resolutions. An example of how laws are cited from this series would be: Ga. Laws 1999, p. 46.

GENERAL ACT: See "Act."

HOPPER: The symbolic name for the place where legislators file bills for introduction with the Clerk of the House or Secretary of the Senate.

ITEM VETO: See "Veto."

JOURNAL: The official record of legislative proceedings in each house. While roll call votes are recorded, individual floor remarks and debate are not recorded in the Journal. Separate journals are maintained daily for the House and Senate and published at the end of the session by the Clerk of the House and Secretary of the Senate.

LAW: An act of the General Assembly, although in a general sense, the term also embraces the constitution, administrative rules and regulations, judicial decisions, and other enforceable rules of government.

LEGISLATION: A general term for bills and resolutions considered by a legislature. See "act," "bill," "law," and "statute."

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET OFFICE: A full-time legislative staff agency that provides the General Assembly -- and in particular, the House and Senate appropriations committees -- year-round support in appropriations, budget, and revenue matters. [Click [here](#) to view LBO web page.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL: A full-time legislative staff agency consisting of attorneys who provide a variety of legal services to members of the General Assembly. The chief responsibility of the Office of Legislative Counsel is assist members who desire to introduce a bill by researching the proposed law and then drafting the bill in proper format.

LEGISLATIVE DAY: Any of the 40 days beginning with the convening of the regular session on the second Monday in January that the General Assembly is in session or in recess without

having adopted a joint resolution to adjourn and stop the count of legislative days. Without a joint resolution to formally adjourn during a session, calendar days -- including Saturday and Sunday -- count as legislative days.

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL OFFICE: A full-time legislative staff agency that is responsible for payment of legislative salaries, allowances, and travel expenses; legislative expenditures; fiscal accounting; purchasing; equipment inventory; and other financial and record-keeping services for the General Assembly.

LEGISLATIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE: A special joint committee consisting of the leadership of both houses that has overall responsibility for administration and management of the General Assembly.

LOBBYING: Activities by persons or groups acting on behalf of others to influence legislation.

LOCAL ACT: See "Act."

LOCAL COURTESY: The tradition in the General Assembly that where the required number of legislators support a local bill that only affects a city or county that falls within their districts, other members of that house out of courtesy will also support that local bill. The idea behind local courtesy is that when a legislative delegation from a city or county agrees on a local bill that affects their city or county only, other members of that house will defer to their judgment and support the bill. Local courtesy, however, is a custom and cannot be enforced -- particularly in the case of local bills affecting Atlanta and Fulton County.

MAIN QUESTION: In parliamentary procedure, the principal issue before a house -- as opposed to amendments and procedural motions. In the House and Senate, a call for the main question is a motion to vote on final passage of a bill or resolution as amended.

MAJORITY LEADER: That legislator chosen by the majority party caucus to lead that party's members in a house.

MINORITY LEADER: That legislator chosen by the minority party caucus to lead that party's members in a house.

MOTION: A proposal made by a legislator to the presiding officer that some action or procedure requiring approval of the membership of that house take place. Unlike the standard rules of parliamentary procedure, motions in the Georgia General Assembly do not require a second.

OFFICIAL CODE OF GEORGIA ANNOTATED: As the name indicates, the official codification of Georgia's statutory law along with annotations of relevant state and federal court decisions, attorney general opinions, law review articles, and other relevant legal information. Georgia's official code consists of 44 volumes organized into 53 code "titles" (major subject areas), which are further subdivided into "chapters," which in turn are subdivided into "sections" (the basic component of the O.C.G.A.). In addition to O.C.G.A., there is an unannotated Code of Georgia maintained by GeorgiaNet that contains all the language of the code but without the legal annotations. [Click [here](#) to access the unannotated code.]

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY: A question addressed to the presiding officer of the house by a legislator regarding the immediate legislative procedure before that body. According to parliamentary rules, a parliamentary inquiry is supposed to address a procedural matter governed by parliamentary rules. However, in the Georgia General Assembly, the most common use of the device is to continue debate on a bill after the previous question has been called. This is done by a member declaring "parliamentary inquiry" to the chair and then asking a substantive or conjectural question about the merits of the bill rather than a true point of parliamentary procedure. Though such inquiry could be declared out of order, the presiding officer customarily responds that the inquiry involves a matter that addresses itself to each member.

PERSONAL PRIVILEGE, POINT OF: A request by a legislator to address the full house -- usually in response to something that has been said or reported in the news media about that member or about the integrity of that house.

POINT OF ORDER: Under parliamentary procedure, the device that allows a legislator to question the presiding officers ruling or action when that legislator believes the chair has not acted according to the rules of that house. Once a point of order has been raised, the chair can consult the rules or ask the Clerk of the House or Secretary of State (who serve as de facto parliamentarians in their respective houses) for their interpretation. Rulings of the chair can be appealed to the full house, though this is seldom done.

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE: The presiding officer of the Senate. Under Georgia's

Constitution, the lieutenant governor serves ex officio as President of the Senate. The President has many of the same powers as the Speaker of the House, including naming officers and members of standing committees and assigning bills to committee. However, because the President is not a member of the Senate, that officer cannot debate or vote on any matter before the Senate.

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE: That senator elected by members of the Senate to preside over that body in the event of the absence, disability, resignation, or death of the President.

PREVIOUS QUESTION: A parliamentary motion used during consideration of a bill or other matter, which if approved by a majority of a quorum, has the effect of cutting off debate and moving on to a vote on the main question -- i.e., final passage of a bill as amended.

QUORUM: The minimum number of members of a body, which when assembled, is required to transact business. The Georgia Constitution establishes a majority of the member of each house as the quorum for that house.

READINGS OF A BILL: The successive readings in chamber of every bill and resolution having the effect of law before the final vote on passage can be taken. The Georgia Constitution requires that the title of every general bill and resolution that will have the effect of law be read on three separate days before a vote can be taken in each house. Local bills and resolutions need only one reading of the measure's title and passage of a full day before a vote can be taken. All reading of bills is done on the House or Senate floor by the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate (or their designees). Readings of general bills and resolutions is as follows:

- **FIRST READING:** In both houses, occurs on the day a bill is introduced in a house and is followed by that bill being assigned to committee.
- **SECOND READING:** In the House, second reading occurs automatically on the legislative day following the bill's introduction. In the Senate, second reading occurs on the legislative day after a bill is reported from standing committee, except that after the 35th day of the session, second reading occurs on the day a bill is reported from committee.
- **THIRD READING:** In both houses, occurs after the presiding officer calls the bill from the calendar for floor consideration. Immediately after third reading, a bill is ready for debate, amendment, and final voting on passage.

REAPPORTIONMENT: Redrawing of election district boundaries -- usually for legislative bodies -- necessitated by uneven population growth and movement so that like election districts consist of equal numbers of people. Reapportionment of U.S. congressional districts and of Georgia House and Senate districts is done by act of the General Assembly. Congressional redistricting is mandated by the U.S. Constitution after each decennial census. The Georgia Constitution similarly requires reapportionment of state House and Senate districts after each census, though the General Assembly is free to reapportion more frequently than once every ten years. In the case of Georgia and other rapidly growing states, reapportionment of the U.S. House of Representatives can also mean gaining a new congressional seat. The Georgia Constitution requires that the Georgia House of Representatives consist of at least 180 members, which means that reapportionment can also result in expanding the number of seats. In contrast, the Constitution mandates that the Georgia Senate consist of not fewer than 54 nor more than 56 senators, meaning Senate reapportionment must operate within these size limits.

RECOMMITMENT: A parliamentary motion to reassign a bill which has been in one committee to the same or a different committee. A motion to recommit may be proposed when a particular standing committee refused to report out a bill. It may also be raised when a bill has reached the stage of floor debate and amendment, and members feel that for whatever reason the bill should be returned to committee for further study.

RECONSIDERATION: A parliamentary motion that can be proposed after a bill has passed or been defeated in a floor vote, which if sustained by a majority allows the house to reconsider its action and vote again on the bill at a subsequent time. This means that a bill that is passed on the floor of a house on one day, can be voted on again -- and defeated -- the next day. Reconsideration requires three steps: (1) Following the first vote, a member gives notice that a motion to reconsider will be made at a later time. (2) At the appropriate time, the motion to reconsider is raised on the floor and voted on by the membership. (3) If the motion to reconsider passes, the bill is placed back on the calendar so that a new vote can be taken.

REFERENDUM: A device whereby a legislature submits to the electorate a chance to vote on whether an act it has passed shall become effective. Georgia does not provide for a statewide referendum on general acts, except that the state constitution requires a general referendum on any act providing for an exemption from ad valorem taxes. Local referenda are commonly

provided for various types of local legislation (e.g., acts proposing annexation and city-county consolidation).

RESOLUTION: A legislative proposal used to express the opinion or will of one or both houses. Resolutions are similar to bills, and may or may not have the force of law, depending on the subject matter and intent of the General Assembly. The following are types of resolutions:

- **SIMPLE RESOLUTION:** A resolution passed in one house only, which means it does not have the force of law.
- **JOINT RESOLUTION:** A resolution passed by both houses, sometimes known as a "concurrent resolution." Depending on the subject matter, intent of the General Assembly, and procedure followed, a joint resolution may or may not have the force of law. Examples of joint resolutions include "compensation resolutions" (used to resolve damage claims by citizens against the state) and resolutions proposed amendments to the Georgia Constitution (which require two-thirds approval in each house).
- **PRIVILEGED RESOLUTION:** A simple or joint resolution that expresses the appreciation, recognition, or sympathy of one or both houses to some individual, group, or organization.

RULES OF THE HOUSE AND SENATE: The set of rules governing parliamentary procedure, legislative requirements, conduct of members, and other matters in each house of the General Assembly. These rules are in addition to, or an elaboration on, provisions of the Georgia Constitution and statutory law governing the General Assembly and the legislative process. Each house is free to adopt its own set of rules, and although there are many similarities between House and Senate Rules, there are also a number of differences. Each house adopts rules for the biennium as one of the first actions following the convening of a new House and Senate in January of odd-numbered years.

SECRETARY OF THE SENATE: The chief staff officer of the Senate and counterpart to the Clerk of the House. The Secretary is not a senator but rather a full-time official who duties include receiving, numbering, and printing copies of all bills and resolutions introduced in the Senate; recording all committee reports and floor votes on measures; and maintaining the official record of legislative action in the Senate. [Click [here](#) for web page of the Secretary of the Senate.]

SESSION: An official meeting period of the General Assembly. There are two types of sessions:

- **REGULAR SESSION:** The annual meeting of the General Assembly that begins the second Monday in January and last for 40 legislative days (so defined to mean calendar days, excluding those adjournments and recesses resulting when both houses adopt a joint resolution to formally adjourn and stop the count of days). Generally, with such adjournments, the regular session concludes in mid-March
- **SPECIAL SESSION:** A special meeting of the General Assembly in order to deal with pressing matters affecting the state. Almost always, special sessions are called by the governor, who sets the agenda of the special session in the call. Should an emergency arise and the governor refuse to call a special session, the General Assembly can convene itself. However called, special sessions are limited to 40 days, unless a resolution to extend the special session is approved by three-fifths of each house and the governor.

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE: That representative proposed by the majority party caucus and elected by members of the majority party in the House of Representatives to preside over the House. The Speaker of the House has the authority to name officers and members of standing committees and assign bills to committee. As a representative, the Speaker can relinquish the chair and speak on matters from the well of the House. Also, the Speaker can vote in case of a tie and in several other special situations.

SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE: That representative elected by members of the House of Representatives to preside over that body in the event of the absence, disability, resignation, or death of the Speaker.

STATUTE: A formal enactment of a legislative body intended to be part of the permanent body of codified law (which in Georgia is the Official Code of Georgia Annotated). All statutes are acts, though some acts of a temporary nature -- such as the annual appropriation acts -- probably do not qualify as statutes. The term "statute" is used to designate written legislative enactments, as distinguished from unwritten or non-legislative types of law (e.g., court rulings and administrative rules and regulations).

SUBSTITUTE BILL: An alternative version of a bill from that originally introduced, usually incorporating a number of amendments so that it substantially differs from the original bill, and usually is introduced by a legislator other than the original author. Though a substitute bill is an

entire bill offered in place of the one originally introduced, the bill number and author of the original bill is placed on the alternative version -- along with a notation that it is a substitute. There is no requirement that the author of the original bill approve the substitute, and in fact the author may end up opposing the changed version.

- **COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE:** An alternative bill introduced within the committee considering the original bill. If the committee favorably recommends the substitute bill, that version is reported to the full house for floor consideration.
- **FLOOR SUBSTITUTE:** An alternative bill introduced on the floor of a house during the period for debate and amendment of a bill. There is no requirement that the floor substitute shall have been considered in committee, which leads some critics of the device to charge that it bypasses the committee system.

TABLE A BILL: A parliamentary motion -- technically "to lay on the table" -- which, if passed, removes a bill or resolution from committee or floor consideration, together with all motions attached to the bill at the time. Tabling a bill postpones further consideration and action on a measure until a later time, at which time it can be brought back before the floor or committee through approval of a motion "to take from the table."

TITLE (BILL): The formal introduction of a bill, required by the Georgia Constitution, that shows the sections of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated that are affected by the bill and the principal subject matter of the bill. The title prefaces the main body of a bill, and is always founded preceding the phrase, "Be It Enacted by the General Assembly of Georgia." It is the title of the bill that is read aloud in the chamber (see "Readings of a Bill").

TITLE (CODE): A major subject area of statutory law as codified. In the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, there are 114 titles, with each title comprising all applicable statutory law on a particular subject (no matter when enacted). For example, Title 32 is the Education Code, Title 34 the Election Code, and Title 26 the Criminal Code.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT: A parliamentary procedure used by the chair to obtain the permission of the members to allow or dispense with some non-controversial action (e.g., reading the journal) without having to take an actual vote. Under unanimous consent, the presiding officer asks if there is objection to the motion or request being voted on. If no legislator voices objection, the matter is approved. However, if any legislator objects, the matter is decided by ordinary voting procedures (e.g., voice vote, hand vote, or roll call vote).

VETO: Written disapproval by the governor of a bill or joint resolution (excluding proposed constitutional amendments, which are not subject to veto). In Georgia, with the exception of the "item veto," a governor's veto applies to the entire bill. A bill vetoed by the governor is dead unless the General Assembly overrides the veto by a two-thirds vote of the total membership of each house.

- **ITEM VETO:** The authority of Georgia's governor to veto specific line item expenditures in appropriation acts, while approving the remainder of the act. An item veto can only be used for appropriations and is overridden in the same manner as an ordinary veto.
- **POCKET VETO:** An authority not provided in Georgia whereby bills not signed by the governor within a specified number of days after the session automatically are vetoed. Under the Georgia Constitution, the reverse is true. Any bill or resolution not signed or vetoed within 40 days following adjournment sine die automatically becomes law without the governor's signature.

WELL: The traditional name for the area at the front of the chamber containing the lectern or podium at which legislators address the full house during debate. The phrase "to take the well" means to come forward to speak to the full body after being recognized by the presiding officer for that purpose.

YEAS AND NAYS: A roll-call vote on the electronic voting machine, also called "ayes and nays."

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